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ABSTRACT

This report discusses current secondary school restructuring efforts of nine school districts that are implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and New York State initiatives to provide students with disabilities access to general education curriculum and settings. It demonstrates how Skrtic's (1995) mutually reinforcing assumptions play out in schools today as they move to comply with both the educational reforms and mandates in the reauthorization of IDEA and the standards-based intensification movement regarding student performance and teacher accountability. Findings from the study indicate: (1) standardization creates inequities that result from a widening gap between what is expected of students in terms of the context and how they perform; (2) neither the general education nor special education systems as they are currently structured can adapt to effectively accommodate the needs of all students; and (3) special education teachers took the initiative for implementing change. The report concludes that in order to achieve the democratic goals of education, schools must restructure under a new paradigm, one that addresses the cultural, structural, and organizational changes to successfully meet the wide range of needs for learners of diverse abilities. (Contains 26 references.) (CR)

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The Widening Gap of Intolerance: An Analysis of Standards-Based Reforms and Special Education in Secondary Schools

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The Widening Gap of Intolerance: An Analysis of Standards-Based Reforms and Special Education in Secondary Schools

We're as frustrated as we can be. As hard as we've worked to get these kids through the curriculum, a lot aren't going to make it. It's nothing more than a separation of the "haves and have nots". What we're seeing are a lot of kids who need a whole lot of extra supports and still probably won't come up to the same level.

Middle School Teacher

A variety of school restructuring efforts have taken place since the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983, as cited in Skrtic, 1991a) published Nation at Risk. This report, and its offspring Goals 2000, provided the impetus for many states to adopt learning standard guidelines for student achievement (Ohanian, 2000). More recently, the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997) clarified the principle that students with disabilities have access to general education curriculum and environments, and redrafted the delivery of special education services as supports provided within the context of general education settings. The push to upgrade standards for achievement and to include all students in these reforms has intensified educators' roles who must now carry out the complex task of deciding how to implement standardization guidelines and, at the same time, restructure their schools to meet the needs of all learners (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997).

This paper reports on the current restructuring efforts of nine school districts that I supported as a technical advisor over two year time period. The districts were implementing IDEA 1997 and New York State initiatives to provide students with

disabilities access to general education curriculum and settings. When I began the study I had no idea that I would focus on the impact of State policy regarding standardization, high stakes testing, and accountability on education for students with disabilities. I was part of a group of educators that felt inefficient school organization hindered participation of students with disabilities to general education and that thoughtful restructuring through reallocation of resources and improved instructional technologies would facilitate inclusion while improving student outcomes. After spending many hours observing in classrooms, listening to teachers and administrators, and reviewing data, I have since come to realize how reform efforts based on standardization reduces educational excellence and violates individual rights. I found I could not ignore the significance of what was so clearly pointed out through these data sources (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995).

I began a project in the spring of 1999 with one school district with the common purpose of facilitating the inclusion of secondary students with high incidence disabilities through technical assistance in its efforts to implement state initiatives. Consequently, the other eight component districts affiliated with the regional BOCES came on board. The original focus of the project was developed through a series of collective meetings where directors of special education from each of the participating districts established three fundamental goals: 1) All students with disabilities should have access to general education curriculum and participate in State/Regents Assessments. 2) Students who participate in State/Regents assessments will receive the supports needed to be successful. 3) Models for shared responsibility between special and general educators will be promoted and developed.

Once goals were in place we solicited general and special education teachers willing to establish co-teaching partnerships by offering them staff development and in-class supports. I initially agreed to take on the role of facilitator because I truly believed at the time that classrooms could successfully accommodate a wide variety of students in secondary settings using "best practices" interventions. These goals were to be achieved through the relocation of resources for co-teaching teams and improved instructional technologies such as cooperative classroom activities where curriculum would be developed around the needs of diverse learners (Berres, Ferguson, Knoblock, & Woods, 1996; Fisher, Sax, Pumpian, Rodifer, & Kreikemeirer, 1997; Jorgensen, 1997; Sage, 1997). As the project went along, I found that I was becoming more and more disillusioned with the change process. Teachers and students were subjected to inflexible bureaucracies that valued the organization more than the children. I encountered a dual system of education that required us to take a "back-door" approach, meaning that any of our initiatives for change were through the special education system. General education administrators paid lip service to supporting our efforts and general education teacher participation varied but, for the most part, they were passive recipients. Moreover, our having to use a "back-door" approach only served to legitimize special education as a valid alternative for hard to teach students and reified the notion of student pathology. Finally, standardization and high stakes testing transformed classrooms learning into practice for upcoming assessments. Mandated curricula and statewide initiatives governed how teachers made decisions about learners.

Secondary schools are facing disturbing times as they strive to meet educational reform directives that intensify expectations by raising the bar while narrowing the

expected performance gap for students (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). This is reminiscent of educational reforms that occurred at the turn of the last century when industrialization and compulsory school attendance were instituted to meet labor and management requirements for manufacturing industries (Skrtic, 1991). Today, little has changed. The corporate demand for technical and service workers reflects our current economy where choice, technology, and competition have replaced industrial requirements as the driving force behind standards that effective schools must achieve in order to meet these corporate demands (Ohanian, 2000).

The legislative response to corporate technological demands is to retool educational expectations for the 21st century as standardization, more accurately described as an intensification of educational expectations and teacher accountability for effective schools. These retooling efforts include mandated texts with standardized assessments aligned with the curriculum, specifications for teaching, and administrative methods guided by evaluation and monitoring (Fullan, 1991; Tilkin & Hyde, 1997).

Contrasting the standardization movement and, more specifically focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities, is the restructuring for excellence which has emerged from the Regular Education Initiatives (REI) of the 1980s, now integrated into the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997). The REI consists of redistributing resources to achieve excellence through school-based management where teacher roles in curriculum, instruction, and decision making are enhanced (Goodlad 1975; Skrtic, 1991; Sizer, 1984). A reallocation of resources and students is central to the REI position that also requires an integration of multiple innovations such as collaboration, innovative instructional

strategies, and staff development (Fullan, 1991; Reynolds, 1976; Skrtic, 1991; Slavin, 1990).

The push to upgrade standards and at the same time to include all students in these reforms has caused a number of problems. The responsibility for these outcomes is directly on the shoulders of teachers who are under extreme pressures from administration to ensure that students meet or exceed State expectations on assessments (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). A result of these directives is that many teachers are watering down curriculum and in-class learning activities so students spend more time practicing for statewide assessments. These types of changes are of great concern especially since a number of teachers have remarked how they have less tolerance for children who, in their words, "will never pass no matter what I do." In raising expectations (and I must qualify this by saying that expectations are raised only in the eyes of those that promote standardized assessments), we marginalize more and more children. We then attempt to plug the gaps with special education and other newly devised services and programs for children who are identified with the modern disability, "most likely to fail." These services come under a variety of names such as specialized classrooms, resource support, academic intervention services, and alternative schooling.

The standardization movement is a powerful opportunity to bring the inclusion debate to the forefront of educational discourse if viewed as an activating force to reevaluate educational placements and programs, becoming the impetus for achieving excellence and equity in public education. (Note: In New York State, if students don't score high enough on elementary and middle school assessments districts must provide academic intervention services the year following the assessments and then retest. For

high school graduation, students with disabilities are required to pass at least five Regents examinations or meet alternative performance indicators. There is a "safety net" Regional Competency Test available for students with disabilities who do not pass the Regents exams).

Although a great deal of educational research examines the quality of strategies and practices for students with disabilities, most investigations stop short of any in-depth critique beyond an analysis of the educational practices themselves (Jorgensen, 1998; O'Shea & O'Shea, 1998). Little attention is given to the foundational assumptions of our educational practices. Skrtic (1991a, 1991b, 1995) provides an analysis of the foundational principles dominant within the functionalist perspective of school organization and educational practices. These assumptions are the result of a process of critical pragmatism – an analysis when the basic assumptions of social practices are themselves treated as problematic. Skrtic's analysis produced four interdependent assumptions upon which special education has been based: 1) disabilities are pathological conditions that students have, 2) differential diagnosis is objective and useful, 3) special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that benefits diagnosed students, and 4) progress results from rational technological improvements in diagnostic and instructional practices. As Skrtic (1991a) points out, these assumptions are grounded in a form of "naïve pragmatism that produces and interprets empirical data on student outcomes and school effects intuitively, according to the four take-for granted assumptions" (pp. 152-153). Because social reality is considered to be something objective, inherently orderly, and rational, a status quo exists in the fields of educational administration, special education, and general education which, ultimately, reinforces the

functionalist presuppositions of human pathology and organizational rationality. According to Skrtic, educational administration maximizes organizational efficiency and rationalizes its orientation according to precepts of scientific management while special education maintains order and reaches difficult to teach students. Professional knowledge is scientific knowledge embedded within scientific management. Educational administration then presumes explicitly that school organizations are rational and implicitly that school failure is pathological. Special education has professional roots in both psychology and biology and presupposes explicitly that school failure is pathological and implicitly that school organizations are rational. Finally, general education is based within both psychology and scientific management and its discourse is both explicitly and implicitly grounded in both professional knowledge and special education.

"It is difficult to change educational beliefs and practices if they are clouded by false assumptions" (Biklen, 1991, p. 387). In education, there is always the tendency to repeat past practices unless we, as professionals, are afforded an out-of-the-box perspective that will move us beyond the conventional structures that frame our endeavors. This paper will demonstrate how Skrtic's mutually reinforcing assumptions play out in schools today as they move to comply with both the educational reforms mandated in the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997) and the standards-based intensification movement regarding student performance and teacher accountability. An investigation into these basic assumptions will enable us to begin a critical discourse on established school organization and practices that will effect meaningful change.

Using data collected during this study, I will illustrate how Skrtic's framework of assumptions is reflected in today's educational organizations and in our practices. If these representations are accurate, any reform efforts will only replicate past practices masked as reforms for effective schools. Unless challenged in this way, our educational practices will further alienate children and youth by highlighting their differences in the name of meeting educational expectations. For this analysis, I have consolidated Skrtic's four assumption into three under which data are organized: Context and student pathology, special education as a rationally conceived and coordinated system, and progress through improved instruction and intervention.

Context and Student Pathology

Standardization creates inequities that result from a widening gap between what is expected of students in terms of the context and how they perform. It narrows the socially constructed notion of an accepted level of normalcy. I found that students were evaluated in knowledge and skill areas that were measured against expected levels of performance. Schools use top-to-bottom organizational evaluative standards (moving from the political arena to school administration to teacher to student) to predict whether students are able to succeed. This approach is based upon a context of failure where unsuccessful students were then categorized accordingly and then placed into available programs to fill in their learning gaps (Biklen, 1988). Student failure could be re-titled intolerance where inflexible organizations of secondary schools and classrooms are unable to accommodate student diversity.

One of the teachers explained to me why she thought students were unable to effectively participate in general education classrooms:

> There's a real good reason why a lot of those students don't belong in those classes because they get lost in the large group. There's just too much going on for them. It's my job to figure out how to make sure they pass the Regents. We do have some heterogeneously grouped classes, but for those students who need more support, then we put them into a separate class where they get an adapted curriculum with more support to meet their needs.

Teachers nearly always classified students within the context of the curricular, evaluative, or general classroom expectations. These became the contextual norms for how teachers made determinations about whether students would meet expected outcomes. Most schooling that I observed was guided by curricular expectations that were based upon performance levels for standardized assessments. If students were unable to meet standardized levels of performance then they were identified as having the potential to fail. For example, in a high school English class teachers were expected to cover district mandated curriculum. Most in-class teaching reflected what would appear on upcoming assessment exams. Students were drilled on specific skills and information, and practiced demonstrating what they learned in ways that met these criteria. In theory, all students were expected to meet the same expectations. Curriculum for most classes was jam packed with concepts, factual information, and skill-based learning expectations. Teachers were required to cover content within a particular time frame which set the pace for covering material. Most often, special educators were relied upon to develop strategies to reinforce material for students who had trouble with the content or needed additional work on skills.

Here, another teacher discusses students' inability to perform basic tasks required to pass assessments:

> See what I mean. Here's a sample of what they're doing. I asked them to write a descriptive summary of the novel we're reading and they can't even indent paragraphs or punctuate properly even though I've gone over it with them a hundred times. There's no way that these kids will pass the tests. This won't even get them a one [out of a possible total score of four].

Most of the teachers I spoke with were trying to do their best, given the restraints of their curriculum and the framework of school organization, to ensure students were successful. Yet, many were frustrated with the top-to-bottom pressures from administrators who were seen as unrealistic in their expecting students to succeed, given inflexible curricular content and standardized assessments. A middle school teacher had this to say about what they considered to be the best thing to do for students:

> I have to do what's right for kids. If they're mentally retarded, they're mentally retarded. We need to go from there if we're going to help them. Now take English, they may not even know what an adjective is, they can't get it and I ask myself, "What can we do about that?" The fifteen-ones are the ones that are just overwhelmed. It's a curriculum thing. We need to hone it down another track and give them more time. When they do get it and rise to the challenge, then it makes their day. (note: "fifteen-ones" in this quote are distinguished from "mentally retarded" in the above quote in that "fifteen-ones" are considered learning disabled and less delayed in learning capacity)

A careful examination of the above data clearly reveals how teachers construct images of youth based upon the contextual reference of curricular expectations. In many cases, disability was linked to performance as the concept of "able" was determined by an ability to grasp the curriculum and perform on tests. The tolerance for those students who could not achieve effectively was diminished to the point where they were identified not as individual learners but by available programs. The blame for failure was rendered as something pathological within the child.

Is Special Education a Rationally Conceived and Coordinated System?

Practically speaking, neither the general education or special education systems as they are currently structured are able to adapt to effectively accommodate the needs of all students (Skrtic, 1991). Although we are seeing a growing acceptance that a new system should be formed by restructuring them into one that is more adaptable to student learning needs, standardization impedes any restructuring reforms as long as students are diagnosed and classified based upon contextual reference points for learning. Given the context of how special education is perceived within educational organizations, the re-conceptualization of special education as "a service not a place" highlighted in the Reauthorization of IDEA (1997) continues to legitimize a separate system for diagnosed students. Whether students identified as disabled are in separate classrooms or with same-aged peers does not address the central issue that a dual educational organization is fundamentally flawed in that it undermines our democratic ideals. Only through a fundamental restructuring of the entire system will we see education grounded in equity.

Our taking a "back door" approach became one of the major barriers to implementing the goals we set out to achieve for the project. Most of the efforts to

change were implemented through special education teachers and directors of special education. This "back door" approach placed the burden of change squarely on the shoulders of the special educators. General educators were, for the most part, already trying to deal with problems of teacher accountability for student learning and wanted no part of what they considered to be additional responsibilities. Data revealed that in many cases the special educators' role was understood to be that of a support personnel. Even when roles were more equally shared, delineating specialized responsibilities only served to further highlight student differences. Learning was more rigidly defined and specific because of intensified requirements so that failing students who needed additional outside academic support were excluded from the mainstream environment.

A special education support teacher explained some of the organizational barriers he faced given the directives that students with disabilities have access to the general education settings:

> They have a lot of special ed. kids in their classroom. For one class they have about eight, and that's a lot. Well, really, for that many kids, really, most of them are making some progress but it's hard to keep track. You know, there are moments where they're completely lost, or assignments don't get done, or they don't put forth the effort as much as they could. But most, at this point, are doing as well as what anyone would expect regardless of where they are or who the teacher is or how many people are in the class.

Another example demonstrates how a dual system hinders equity of students through the use of Individualized Education Program (IEP) diplomas. By high school, many students were categorized by program and steered away from a regular high school

diploma in favor of an IEP certificate of attendance. Evelyn was one of the resource teachers advocating this practice. She was responsible for 24 high school students identified as learning disabled. She structured her room as if it were a self-contained classroom with students only leaving for specials. All of the students in her class were slotted to receive IEP diplomas. She told me that she developed the curriculum herself, using available texts. Most of the day I observed students working in isolation on functional and organization skills, consumer math, and simple writing and reading tasks. She said many learning and social barriers prevented her students from attending general education classes. In her view, most of her students were unprepared for the rigors of general education curriculum and a separate classroom environment was more effective in meeting their educational needs. "Right now I'm working with a 17 year old who reads on a 6th grade level and would have to take the 9th grade English Regents class. There is no way that I'd put him in that situation, a senior coming into 9th grade who has a hard time reading. Can you imagine the anxiety level for that student?"

When I asked about students with disabilities in general education classes most responses I received from general educators were similar to this one: "I'm concerned about the practicality of having them there and whether what we're doing is really helping any of these students who should be in special ed."

During an observation of co-teaching I followed an 8th grade special educator who pulled-out special education students to the resource room and drilled them with a English language Arts assessment preparation workbook for two class periods. She read them the directions and excerpts from stories in the workbook. They answered questions in the workbook. Some were able to pick out the main idea from what she'd read but

none actually read anything during the practice. When asked about her practices, the teacher responded: "Most of my students are receiving IEP diplomas anyway. If I had my way I'd get them out of the regular English class so they wouldn't have to take the test."

One of the inclusion implementation strategies adopted by the State Education Department was creating " blended" classes. This was recommended as a more efficient use of personnel resources. Here, a special education director presents her viewpoint on how blended classes are more efficient ways to include students with disabilities:

> We used to be very conscious of saying that we don't want to put too many kids [with disabilities] in a class at one time. One or two here, one or two there. The reality was that teachers were overwhelmed trying to keep up with everything and we couldn't provide adequate support. We fought for that but we know there are limited resources...we don't have unlimited amounts of people. Now, when we do a schedule we look at it to maximize our staff. Say, 1st period, we'll take these eight kids and put them in here, and then next period we'll put five in there. There's nothing to say that you can't do this to get them into the classes and then provide resource services at other times during the day.

Another approach that was prevalent in several districts was to teach special education students a watered down curriculum that was "parallel" to the general education curriculum and taught in separate classes. Periodically, these classes were brought together "for enrichment"

The following explanation of academic supports gives us further insight into why parallel classes, blended classes, and other special education and remedial services are viewed as rational responses to student learning needs:

> We try to operate on the basis of least restrictive environment. One of the things we're doing now which has some affect on this policy is that we've expanded our remedial services to include those "not special ed." The State's telling us we have to do it for 8th graders if they don't pass the exams. Our feeling is we're not going to wait for it to happen. This is a positive thing, not only for these kids but it'll run off to the special ed. kids as well. Although this school offers additional learning supports, we still do them separately.

This response to the above comment by the principal came from one of the participating teachers:

> In this building right now, these kids are just second-class citizens. Unfortunately, the district is not as supportive of the special ed. students, especially when they aren't performing on the ELA tests. All kids are having difficulty with these and the special ed. kids are right in there, but the district won't commit the resources that'll make the difference. For them, the bottom line is finance and cost efficiency. We hear it all day long.

Progress Comes Through Improved Instructional Interventions

Special education was charged with providing academic supports for students with disabilities to ensure that they made adequate academic progress. One of the ways we tried to accomplish this in the project was through improved interventions such as co-teaching, and implementing cooperative learning and differentiated instructional

strategies. This was not a new idea. As far back as the mid 1970s proponents of the Regular Education Initiative favored mainstreaming of students with disabilities into regular classes through a redistribution of resources, energies, training and reallocation of student populations (Reynolds, 1976). A large amount of my time was spent working with teachers to learn new skills and practices that would facilitate inclusion. For the most part, even though many collaborative teams were voluntarily created and ongoing staff development was provided, it was special education teachers who took the initiative for implementing change. Few general educators were initially involved. In general, a number of both general and special educators questioned whether students would make adequate progress through these changes in instructional practices. This was due to the large number of students who continued to fail on standardized assessments, all the while teachers were directed by administrators to intensify instruction to improve student outcomes. Many of the teachers remained skeptical that any intervention would be helpful given the results they were getting.

One of the teachers I worked with discussed how she tried to consider individual student needs linked to positive outcomes on assessments:

> This particular group that I have is extremely limited experientially for a vocabulary background. A very, very concrete…vocabulary has been an issue for this group all along. It's difficult but we either memorize it or put it into a package of "that's what we're looking for from an assessment standpoint." And, go from there. Using this, I can teach my guys to do it, some better than others, but I think they can do it given that there are a couple of different ways to get there.

Co-teaching strategies varied from team to team. For example, Evelyn (math teacher) definitely led the class and Ellen (special educator) would "drift" around the room. Ellen had small jobs and supported individual children during math practice. It played out differently for Ed (special educator) and Louis (9th grade English) who used a tag team approach. One taught while the other supported students and each of their roles would switch back and forth. Ed began with expectations and setting up groups for the day's activities. Louis clarified expectations and each then went to work with small groups. They took turns circulating the room and occasionally would confer and interject a thought for the whole class to hear.

In another co-teaching situation the team was struggling just to find time to teach together:

> I'm pushing into Mary's class, one bell one day a week. We're really flying by the seat of our pants. We're just in the beginning stage: getting organized, deciding who will do what. It's kind of like what I do is diagnosis and then we address needs based on what they need. So, we might try to address listening skills, or writing and reading, or whatever…doing ELA stuff at the end.

Although most teams tried to work together collaboratively, pressure from administration for teacher accountability led more times than not to grouping students homogeneously in separate classes to ensure they covered the curriculum. A special educator explained how resource help was essential for his students: "The problem I have with doing push-in is that there are certain things they have to have. And we've got to make sure we're teaching these children those things. The bottom line is that most won't get what they need without one-on-one or resource help."

Given the constraints of standardization a number of teachers were skeptical of whether putting students classified with learning difficulties into general education settings:

> They want us to do something that just isn't attainable. Most kids are completely overwhelmed. A few kids, if they get enough support, if they're LD or whatever, if they have the right supports, they can make progress...So, what I end up doing with these students is teaching to the test. In effect, we're dumbing down the curriculum to make sure they'll pass, with the idea we're raising the bar. It's like, "Hello, is anyone thinking here?"

Sorting out the Pieces of the Puzzle

Special education serves as a smoke screen for an educational system unable to confront its deficiencies. Skrtic (1991a, 1991b) points out that general education has not had to confront its uncertainties because of the objectification of school failure as student disability. Rather than objectively examine the underlying problems that have continued to plague education for more than a century, general education professionals rely on empirical studies on student outcomes and the effects of schooling that are interpreted through the taken-for-granted false assumptions. This approach is deceptive in that it spares general educators from having to confront whether it is truly fulfilling its democratic ideals.

Response to student failure in general education arrived in the form of disjointed programs. There were more "add-ons" for students who were not meeting the expectations set by a standardization of curriculum and evaluations. These programs, which were established for the purpose of getting students to pass, had little meaning in

terms of real learning and only served to rid general education of the hard-to-teach students. In fact, evidence suggests that "there is no real distinction between students who are or are not labeled as learning disabled and those who are and are not served in learning disabled programs" (Biklen, 1991, p. 387). Teachers were, for the most part, caught between top-to-bottom directives for expected outcomes and greater diversity in their classes. They were frustrated with inflexible school organizations as well as inadequate resources where programs for students were established as a letter of the law response rather than to the spirit of the law. As a result, teachers resorted to defensive teaching practices such as teaching to the test to ensure students would pass or move failing students into suitable programs.

Another consequence of top-down directives and add-on programs is that the responsibility for change falls directly to the student (Biklen, 1991). Rather than establishing organizational level changes to meet the ever-changing needs of students, students are expected to change to meet demands created by inflexible school organizations. School organization is deemed rational through the predominate paradigm view that a single social reality exists and improvement comes through incrementally improved programming. Student failure is the result of deficiencies within the student that can be remedied only by specially designed programs. Here, the taken-for-granted assumptions are reaffirmed in that students are the ones who must change to meet expectations of the dominant perspective. Special education programs are symptomatic representatives of general education's quest for order and certainty in the field of education (Skrtic, 1991a) where students are expected to meet preset expectations that legitimize the prerequisite requirements of order and certainty.

"Standardization reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools. Over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students" (McNeil, 2000, p. 3). In her study of Houston City Schools, McNeil brings to light the negative impact of the student performance and teacher accountability policy reforms on children's learning and democracy. The educational costs are high in that standardization is damaging to the social construction of knowledge in the classroom where teachers become workers and students are consumers of educational products (Ohanian, 2000). However, McNeil stops short of questioning the fundamental assumptions of education asserting that these are malfunctions in a system with the effects of "de-skilling teachers, restratifying access to education and, in incipient ways, de-democratizing education (p. 270). These are not flaws in the system, she concludes, but logical consequences of a functioning system.

Standards of performance translates into intolerance. As more students with disabilities are "blended" into general education classes and more students are categorized as most or least able and grouped accordingly, accepted levels of variance become much narrower. Previously, "defective" students were removed to special education for remedial services. Today, when students are not meeting performance standards additional programming supports are required, and even though they may or may not fall under the umbrella of special education, these supports are still representative of public education's inability to accommodate school diversity.

School administration is grounded in efficiency and scientific management. It confuses professional educational practices and reconfigures them into mechanistic

bureaucracies (Skrtic, 1991a, 1991b). Our dual education system is considered logical in that it presumably meets the needs of failing students. Unfortunately, this system has only exacerbated the problem of equity in our schools as it attributes failure to something that's wrong with the student. Program changes in schools are our reactionary responses to unexplained student failure in an attempt to sustain the organization rather than the meet the student's learning needs. Under the standardization initiatives, resources are reallocated and work standards reestablished. All contribute to a more efficient, yet mechanistic organization. Separate or dual administrative systems, each with its own set of administration, regulations, funding, and personnel fosters a hierarchical relationship between the general and special education organizations. This power hierarchy legitimizes special education as a valid instructional alternative by hiding the fact that general education is failing students.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Until now, general education has lacked any type of critical discourse to explore the issues of why students continue to fail and why it is not living up to its democratic ideals. Even with push-in and collaborative models to promote inclusion and we are still destined to repeat our past tendencies of inequities unless school professionals show willingness to critically examine whether the fundamental assumptions which guide our educational practices. School structures are organizational bureaucracies founded on the industrial values of efficiency that limit our democratic ideals of equity and excellence. Standardized curriculum guided by top-down policies are also contrary to these ideals. They further promote the false notions of failure due to student pathology and validate

the notion that progress for these students will result through incremental improvements in interventions and programs.

To achieve the democratic goals of education, schools must restructure under a new paradigm, one that addresses the cultural, structural, and organizational changes to successfully meet the wide range of needs for learners of diverse abilities. I propose that a critical discourse regarding education begin which invites the collaborative input from multiple sources of our social structures. This entails collaborative dialogues between parents and other community members, including professionals, political leaders, and business representatives, to arrive at shared meanings of the world and what students require. These relationships could be characterized, as Skrtic has suggested, by a problem-solving approach to address the fundamental issues facing education that explores how standardization and teacher accountability affects not only student achievement but also infringes on our democratic ideals.

Lous Heshusius (1995) in her chapter on "Holism and Special Education" presents us with a starting point for this discourse: "The dominant world-view by which we have made sense out of life for the past three or four centuries is collapsing all around us, and in us; in our relationship to each other, to knowledge, to the planet, and in our dawning awareness that our minds have been separated from our bodies, emotions, and spiritual needs, resulting in unprecedented levels of alienation and lack of coherence" (p. 165). Heshusius explains that Western science is no longer equipped to explain the nature of reality or our place within "it" and that within special education, terms such as natural science paradigm, reductionist, or Newtonian are no longer appropriate (Heshusius, 1989).

Education is an eduction, a bringing out what is latent in a person (Moore, 1996). It is rooted in the word educe which means to draw forth or elicit as in developing one's potential. True education entails an emergence of character and personality which is grounded in the fundamental belief of the human potential to progress. Yet, "One of great problems of our time is that many are schooled but few are educated" (Moore, p. 3). As we look to the future we have an opportunity as educators to begin a discourse upon which our public educational structures are founded on these fundamental purposes of education. We have a responsibility to reevaluate the kinds of educational experiences made available to our students where they elicit potentials from within so that they may better understand their world and their place in it.

These recommendations will only be as effective as the approaches we choose to take. If we remain rooted in the industrialized educational structures that dominate today's reform efforts, we are destined to repeat the same mistakes that marginalized student in the first place. If, however, we are willing to risk stepping outside the box of the fundamentalist paradigm, possibilities will unfold that are consistent with our democratic ideals of equity and respect for all.

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